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New York

President:	Mr. Muñoz	(Chile)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Antonio
	Benin	Mr. Adechi
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Germany	Mr. Trautwein
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Spain	Mr. Arias
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2003/1212)

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04-20791 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2003/1212)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Afghanistan in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Farhádi (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Brahimi to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members have before them document S/2003/1212, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and invite him to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: The Council has before it my latest report on the situation in Afghanistan. Since its release, an important and very encouraging development in the implementation of the Bonn peace process has occurred: the adoption on 5 January by the Constitutional Loya Jirga of Afghanistan's new Constitution.

The Constitution, which has now entered into force, provides a permanent foundation for re-establishing the rule of law in Afghanistan. It defines a political order through a strong presidential system of government with a bicameral legislature. It establishes a judicial system in compliance with Islam, and it includes provisions aimed at ensuring full respect for fundamental human rights, including equal rights for women.

I would like to congratulate the people and the Government of Afghanistan on this major accomplishment. The delegates to the Loya Jirga showed wisdom, flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of all Afghans — a spirit which bodes well for the hard work ahead.

Of course, the Constitution will not by itself guarantee peace and stability. Afghans, with the necessary support from the international community, must now go on to address the impediments to the peace process that existed before the Loya Jirga, and that means tackling the deeply troubling security situation, ensuring an inclusive and broadly representative Government, and quickening the pace of reconstruction. Indeed, if the next step in the Bonn process — elections — is to be credibly achieved, these challenges demand immediate action.

I would also like to thank the international community for its sustained commitment to peace in Afghanistan. At the same time, I think we can all recognize that for all the gains made under the Bonn process so far, there is a need to reinvigorate the process. With that in mind, and as mentioned in my report, I have suggested that the international community, the Afghan Government and all Afghans committed to peace in their country should come together, assess the progress made and make the necessary commitments to complete the transition. Mr. Brahimi will have more to add on this when he takes the floor.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to my Special Representative, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for the superb job he has done in Afghanistan these past two years. Lakhdar, you have richly earned your honorary Afghan citizenship. You are also, of course, one of our leading

global citizens, and the international community is that much stronger for having your skills and judgement at its disposal.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement, the information he has provided and his kind words addressed to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, which I am sure we all share.

At this meeting the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. As this is the last time Mr. Brahimi will deliver a briefing in that capacity, I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of all the members of the Council to pay a well deserved tribute to him for his outstanding contributions to the cause of peace and the promotion of democracy in Afghanistan. With his persistence, patience, determination and integrity, Mr. Brahimi has been able to carry out successfully a number of United Nations missions, ranging from the former Zaire to Afghanistan. With respect to that latter mission, the members of the Security Council have all been witness to the appreciation and gratefulness of the people of Afghanistan and their authorities for Mr. Brahimi's enormous contribution during his time in Afghanistan. All members of the Council wish him the greatest success in the endeavours he undertakes in future.

I now give the floor to Mr. Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

Mr. Brahimi: I am extremely grateful to the Secretary-General and the President for their kind words. It is an honour to address the Council one more time — the last, I think, on Afghanistan. And I am particularly pleased to do so under your presidency, Ambassador Muñoz. It was a privilege to receive you, Sir, in Kabul last fall, and I would like to thank you again for your interest and support. Allow me also to thank all your colleagues, the members of the Council who, soon after your own visit, made a truly historic fact-finding trip to Afghanistan under the able and energetic leadership of Ambassador Pleuger.

As a result of the extensive meetings you all had then, in Kabul, in Mazar-I-Sharif and in Herat, there is not much I can tell the Council today that members do not already know. In addition, the Council has before it the Secretary-General's report, which describes in some detail recent developments of note, and there is no need, therefore, to cover in my remarks all aspects of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

However, this report was completed before the end of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, as the Secretary-General just told the Council, and I propose to use this opportunity to brief the Council on this Loya Jirga and then to discuss in broad terms the state of the peace process in Afghanistan: what has been achieved and what has not, the challenges ahead and where, in my view, the Afghan authorities and the international community will need to focus their efforts if our shared goals are to be achieved.

The transitional political process of the Bonn Agreement is a plan to restore peace and stability to Afghanistan by reforming, strengthening and, where necessary, rebuilding the institutions of State. The success we may ascribe to it will depend upon how far Afghanistan will have managed to establish viable, accountable and representative State institutions that can ensure security for the people and establish a credible base for the development of the country.

The Bonn process has certainly accomplished a great deal since December 2001. I will mention only some important achievements here. Large-scale conflict has not returned, a humanitarian crisis was averted early on and the political timetable has for the most part been kept: from the installation of the Interim Authority on 22 December 2001 through the holding of the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, the formation of President Karzai's Administration and now the successful conclusion of the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

Under President Karzai's leadership, the Afghan Administration has overseen some worthy accomplishments, including the articulation of a national development framework and the national budget, the adoption of a new national currency, the first steps in the formation of a national army and a national police and the return to school of some 4 million boys and girls. During the same period, the Independent Human Rights Commission established itself throughout the country, and the groundwork was laid for a number of key national reconstruction and development programmes. Some of these are beginning to reap benefits for the country, such as the road reconstruction programme, the restoration of the power grid, increased agricultural activity, the national

solidarity programme and the national emergency employment programme.

A further step in the Bonn transitional plan was achieved on 4 January with the near unanimous acclamation of the new Constitution. The Constitutional Loya Jirga was to a large degree representative of Afghanistan taken as a whole and included delegates from every province and from communities such as the Kuchis — or nomads — Hindus and Sikhs, refugees, internally displaced persons and the disabled, as well as other minority groups. Women's political participation increased, with women delegates comprising approximately 20 per cent of the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

To the best of our knowledge, there was no widespread pattern of intimidation or fraud, and individual cases of complaints were investigated by an executive committee that overturned electoral results in a number of cases where wrongdoing was established. I am not saying that the process was flawless. This was an exercise that took place in an insecure environment. Security conditions had deteriorated since the Emergency Loya Jirga, and extremists had repeatedly threatened to disrupt the Loya Jirga process. Furthermore, with insufficient security sector reform and practically no disarmament done, factional leaders were left with leverage in the political contest.

The elections also showed a resurgence of some of the factional groupings, with stronger showings than for the Emergency Loya Jirga. This has potential consequences for the forthcoming legislative elections. Jihadi parties organized themselves well in the North-East. Jumbish, a mainly Uzbek organization, took the lead in forming a block of votes from the North, while in Badghis and Herat, for example, the majority were Jamiat, the mainly Tajik party, and Ismael Khan supporters.

Much of the Constitutional Loya Jirga unfolded before the country on live radio and television broadcasts, providing a type of public debate not seen in the country for many, many years. The Loya Jirga reached early consensus on some 120 of the 160 articles of the draft constitution, but it saw difficult debate and hard bargaining on a number of issues. Many of these were issues one would expect to be contentious in any constitutional process: the form of Government, the role of the courts in constitutional review and their relative power versus the executive and Parliament. Other issues were particular to the current Afghan context and were related to local and national identity, including various issues related to language.

There were somewhat worrying but not unexpected signs of polarization along ethnic lines. The Pashtun contingent represented a majority in the Loya Jirga and was particularly intent on redressing some of the perceived political disenfranchisement of the past two years. Its unity of purpose may well influence the remaining stages of the political transition. On other issues, there were complaints that Jihadi leaders used domineering tactics to push for their own agenda, but not with much success. As the Loya Jirga extended beyond its originally planned 10 days into a third week, there were real concerns that agreement might not be reached.

In the end, the delegates proved willing to reach compromises and to make concessions in order to arrive at a text that all could accept, and the Constitution they ratified reflects this balancing of concerns. For example, the strong presidential system has been revised to give the National Assembly greater oversight over presidential appointments. Also, although Pashto is the language of the national anthem, the Constitution recognizes minority languages as official in the areas where they are the language of the local majority. This Constitution requires adherence to international instruments and mandates the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission to protect and promote human rights. Significantly, the political participation of women is greatly enhanced by the Constitution. At least 25 per cent of the seats of the lower house of Parliament will be reserved for women.

I believe that the new Constitution and the process that achieved it should be a source of pride for the people of Afghanistan. They have proved that, despite the adversity they continue to face, a peaceful constitution-making process could be achieved. The fundamental law they have newly written should, if implemented, provide a solid foundation upon which to continue the task of addressing the real needs that face Afghans on a daily basis.

There is so much to be done that, unfortunately, Afghans and their international partners cannot afford to rest long on the laurels of a successful Constitutional Loya Jirga. From the Loya Jirga itself a number of major tasks immediately present themselves.

First is the task of implementing the Constitution to give life to it. At the closing ceremony of the Loya Jirga, I made the point that President Karzai, his Government and all Afghans will now have the challenge of making of the Constitution they adopted a living reality. This is, of course, the challenge of any constitutional order. However, in Afghanistan, where State institutions remain weak, the capacity of the Government to fulfil the promises of the new Constitution requires a lot of hard work from the Afghans themselves and sustained international assistance. This is all the more pressing because the debate at the Loya Jirga has raised the expectations of Afghans that their Government and its international partners will now deliver on their promise of peace and stability.

The fact that Afghans reached agreement on the new Constitution is a great accomplishment, but ultimately the test of each element of the Bonn process will be whether or not Afghanistan is moved forward towards what I have referred to previously before the Council as the irreversibility of peace. From that perspective, the new constitutional order will have meaning for the average Afghan only if security improves and the rule of law is strengthened. And for too many Afghans, the daily insecurity they face comes not from resurgent extremism associated with the Taliban — destabilizing as that is — but from the predatory behaviour of local commanders and officials who nominally claim to represent the Government.

Thus, if expectations have been raised, they are likely to focus on the needs that have been there since the start of the peace process and remain unmet: the disarmament of factional forces, the protection of the basic rights of every Afghan citizen, the demand for increased reconstruction, the reform of national institutions so that they are more professional and more representative, and reform, also, across the Government to ensure that all Afghans feel that it better represents them.

These are the first major challenges in implementing the Constitution because they remain the challenges of the peace process as a whole. Addressing them will also create the conditions for the success of the national electoral exercises, the legislative drafting processes and the other tasks that are more directly called for in the implementation of the Constitution.

The programmes that make up the security sector reform initiative for Afghanistan are well known to this Council and they are updated in the report of the Secretary-General. Over the past two years of the Bonn process, the creation of a capable, unified and loyal national army and police has certainly shown progress, with the able and committed assistance of the United States and France on the army-building side, and Germany and the United States for the police. But I am sure these partners will not disagree that, two years into the Bonn process, we are not as far as we should be if the central Government is to assert its authority. Further gains could certainly be made if the effort to reform the national security institutions, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the intelligence services were to pick up pace as this, too, has been slower than required, in large measure because of limited cooperation in key parts of the Government.

The appointment of a new top cadre of 22 Ministry of Defence officials, welcome as it was, is not enough reform to show for two years of trying. I believe the Afghan people expect more, and so should the international community. As we have discussed before, the security institutions will need to be seen as truly national, rather than factionally dominated, if the national army, the national police and intelligence are to replace the factionalized forces that continue to dominate the landscape. Disbanding the factional structures will also depend on successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), and thus the disarmament and demobilization of the factions and the building of a national army and police are really part and parcel of one and the same effort.

Now, I am afraid that the DDR programme has also not progressed far enough and this, too, is due in large measure to insufficient cooperation from key partners. There can be only two ways to conduct a DDR programme. Involuntary disarmament may be contemplated if one has at one's disposal the forces necessary to compel cooperation. Voluntary disarmament, on the other hand, such as we are pursuing, requires fully cooperative partners. And, so far, cooperation has been measured, at best. With the experience of the pilot projects in Kunduz, Gardez, Mazar-I-Sharif and Kabul to draw upon, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will be reviewing the DDR programme with its Government and international partners to see whether

improvements might be made and acceleration of the process achieved. It will be necessary to look at an increased incentive structure for mid- and senior level commanders, but I fear that without better cooperation from the faction leaders — who, let us remember, are Government officials — the problem of factionalized armed units will continue to bedevil the peace process.

Having said that, the threat factional forces pose to the peace process has been increasingly compounded by the terrorist tactics of extremists aimed at causing the peace process to fail altogether. The pattern continues of challenging the central Government's authority and disrupting the peace process by attacking targets of opportunity, irrespective of their civilian status, be they Government, non-governmental organization, United Nations or ordinary citizens. In the period since I last briefed the Council, a number of serious attacks have occurred, including, last November, a car-bomb attack on the United Nations compound in Kandahar and the tragic and revolting murder in Ghazni of Bettina Goislard, a staff member of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A bomb exploded against the external wall of a UNAMA guesthouse in Kabul mercifully produced no victims. And, on 6 January, another bomb in Kandahar, aimed at Afghan militia forces, killed and injured innocent children and civilians.

The recent attacks and threats must be taken to confirm that the United Nations, as such, is now a target in Afghanistan. These attacks coincide with clear signals that extremist elements calling themselves Taliban or supporters of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are reorganizing, issuing statements and trying to rally support against the peace process. For months now, these attacks have constricted the area of operations of the United Nations and the non-governmental organization community in the south, east and south-east. This has the effect of blocking reconstruction and development activities and limiting the presence of the Government in the affected areas.

A number of measures have been taken in response. The United Nations Security Management Team has taken steps to minimize United Nations staff exposure to risk, including by increasing security measures at our compounds and reducing staff in high-risk areas. UNAMA will require further funding for these and other protective measures.

The costly and intensive efforts by the United States and Pakistan to interdict extremist elements at the border deserve recognition. At the same time, there are also press reports, generally in the Pakistani press itself, relayed by the media worldwide, about "infiltration of terrorists" from Pakistan, and other reports claiming that Taliban leaders are moving more or less freely in and between cities in Pakistan. It is encouraging that Pakistani and Afghan authorities are now discussing these issues of concern in a positive and constructive manner. I believe it is vital that the two countries continue to cooperate and take all possible measures to address this situation. The strong bonds of history, religion, and culture that unite Afghanistan and Pakistan are well known. Officials and common people alike, in both countries, are well aware that conflict and strife in one country will unfailingly and directly affect the other. The growing cooperation between the two countries against terrorists, criminals and other spoilers deserves to be recognized, encouraged and strongly supported.

I should also note here that, in my view, much more can and should be done by the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that in the areas where the Taliban and other extremists are operating they do not gain from dissatisfactions in the population. The Government, along with UNAMA, United Nations agencies and international security forces, is working out integrated packages to improve district level governance, strengthen the formal and traditional justice system, increase the presence of police and reach out with focused reconstruction assistance to communities. These so-called "provincial strategies" will focus first on areas in the south and elsewhere suffering from insecurity, poor governance, marginalization for geographical or political reasons and a sense of isolation. There is also more that the Government can do to reach out to those individuals and groups that have not been part of the process so far but that are not responsible for criminal activities and are willing to participate peacefully in the rebuilding of their country.

As the Secretary-General makes clear in his report, the deterioration in security continues at precisely the time when the peace process requires the Government and the United Nations to broaden their presence in the field, to complete the electoral registration and other activities, such as the census and ongoing reconstruction programmes. As the report

further points out, throughout the constitutional process, the threat was mitigated by limiting exposure, by not holding new district level elections and by concentrating activities in urban centres protected by available security resources. However, recent attacks in urban areas are challenging that approach for the registration of voters. Naturally, the national electoral registration and, later, polling exercises cannot be conducted from behind a hardened compound wall. Electoral teams must go to the voters, and each eligible and willing voter must be served directly at the village level.

UNAMA and the interim electoral commission are planning to absorb into the Afghan Electoral Commission's secretariat staff from the constitutional secretariat. They may be better able to travel and work locally than international staff. However, if the process itself is targeted, then I am afraid that Afghan nationality may not be a sufficient source of protection. Furthermore, successful electoral exercise will require more than security for electoral staff; it will require an environment that allows for a fair political contest. The prominence at the Loya Jirga of leaders who continue to wield personal control over factional forces raises serious concerns in this regard and reminds us once again of the need for accelerated security sector reform, for DDR and for increased international security assistance.

It is too early to draw lessons from the first two years of the Bonn process, but I firmly believe that one clear lesson relates to the difficulty of carrying out post-conflict transitional processes without equivalent and dedicated security assistance. Until Afghan security institutions are further built up, there will be a need in other parts of the country for the sort of assistance that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has so ably given in Kabul.

UNAMA, along with almost all Afghans, received with great anticipation the news of the resolution adopted by the Council providing for the expansion of ISAF. The recent launch of the German provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Kunduz is a welcome sign that some form of expansion is beginning in earnest. My colleagues and I at UNAMA have met with NATO planners on the ground, and we look forward to the creation of more ISAF-led PRTs. Also welcome is the intention of the United States to create a broader PRT presence in the south. The PRT concept has proved to be of value, particularly where they have focused their activities on improving security conditions.

While I continue to believe that the PRTs are a "second best" to a straightforward expansion of ISAF's peacekeeping functions, I do hope that they will be given the resources and the mandate to help accelerate security sector reform, participate in the Government's and UNAMA's efforts to manage and defuse local tensions and, more generally, help coordinate security support for the Bonn process — all the more so if there is some capacity for ISAF to conduct forward deployments of more robust forces when and where necessary, as I understand is being considered.

It is cause for concern, however, that the pace of PRT deployment is running behind that of the political process. The presidential elections will require improved security, and the legislative elections even more so. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, it might be possible to hold presidential elections with a few areas of the country remaining off limits, although that has its risks. Doing so with legislative elections, however, would mean disenfranchising people along ethnic lines, and that would not be tenable. Therefore, I would urge the members of NATO and other countries contributing troops to ISAF to take all measures possible to provide ISAF with the resources necessary to expand sooner rather than later.

I have taken much of the Council's time, but, if I may, I should like to say a few words about drugs. One of the most worrying aspects of the drug trade is how much the Afghan economy — and therefore the population — is coming to depend on it. The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), estimates that the income of opium farmers and drug traffickers in 2003 — totalling an estimated $2.3 billion — was equivalent to more than 50 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. It is also estimated that, in 2003, 1.7 million people — representing approximately 7 per cent of the population — were involved in farming the opium poppy. Also in 2003, the opium poppy was grown in 28 out of the country's 32 provinces. Those statistics are all the more alarming when one considers that, according to the preliminary results of the UNODC farmers' intentions survey, conducted in the latter half of 2003, farmers are intent on growing the opium poppy again in 2004 and with greater intensity.

The central Government has shown a commitment to tackling the problem. But to date, efforts have concentrated on building the capacity of Government institutions such as the Counter-Narcotics Directorate and the counter-narcotics police of Afghanistan and on drafting legislation. While those activities are indeed essential in the long-term fight against drugs, they have not had an immediate effect on the amount of opium cultivated or trafficked.

Drug interdiction campaigns will also have to be intensified. That responsibility is shared by all authorities involved in law enforcement, including the counter-narcotics police, the border police and all military forces in the country. However, as is recognized by the Afghan national drug control strategy, the problem will not be solved over the long term without development and achievements being made in other sectors, including in providing alternative livelihoods, in building up the judicial and penal systems and in reducing demand for opium derivatives both domestically and abroad. The Government; the United Kingdom, as lead nation; and the UNODC are working together and with others to meet those formidable challenges.

At the outset, I said that Afghanistan had achieved much in the past two years. However, as I believe I have said before to the Council, those achievements also mean that there is now even more to lose and more to protect. The Afghans and their international partners — including the Council — will have to chart the way forward carefully. The success of the Constitutional Loya Jirga and of the political debate that has begun does offer hope, but it is a success that must be quickly capitalized on, lest it do no more than raise false expectations.

And I believe the key challenges that must quickly be addressed remain the same today, after the Loya Jirga, as they were described in the Secretary-General's report before the Loya Jirga: broadening the popular base of the Government and strengthening a system of governance based on the rule of law; improving security; and increasing the pace of reconstruction and service delivery.

There are many indications that, in those three areas, not enough progress is being made, and some of the gaps may even have widened over the past year. On the security front, those indications are many, and they have been detailed often to the Council. Concerning the base of popular support for the Government, for example, there were clear indications at the Loya Jirga of disaffection among Pashtuns who thought they were not receiving a fair degree of representation in the Government. On the reconstruction front, the assistance in the south, the east and the south-east is slowly decreasing because of insecurity. In the economic field more generally, the Minister of Finance has noted that the hurried estimates carried out at the height of the crisis for the 2001 Tokyo conference need to be revisited, and he is conducting a re-costing exercise to determine actual investment needs in order to achieve basic financial sustainability and to prevent the domination of the national economy by the narcotics industry.

Following its visit to Afghanistan in early November, the Council recommended that the Secretary-General explore ways to give new impetus to the Bonn process. His report discusses some of the possibilities, and he again alluded to them in his statement a moment ago. UNAMA circulated a non-paper on the subject in Kabul to the Government and the diplomatic corps. The paper noted that a second Bonn-type conference was one possible way to re-energize the commitment of all concerned to address the three gaps in the peace process that I just mentioned. Some interlocutors observed that there may be other means to address these gaps, and that a large conference is perhaps not necessary. However, what is important and, I personally believe, very urgent, is that some means are identified in order to improve and accelerate the performance of the Government and its international partners in implementing the Bonn process, lest these gaps undermine the progress that has already been made.

As I near the end of my far-too-long briefing, I would like to thank the Council once again for the remarkable support that it has shown for Afghanistan. The coherent and sustained support of the Council, and the generosity and close collaboration of the wider international community, have been essential to the progress made.

Furthermore, I cannot conclude today's briefing without a few words about the people whom I left behind in Afghanistan — first, an expression of profound gratitude, respect and admiration to President Hāmid Karzai. It was a privilege to know and work with such an Afghan patriot, dedicated to his country and his people, modest, honest and selfless. I cannot

thank him enough for the frank, open and close cooperation I have consistently enjoyed with him. I would like, from here, to wish him, once again, success in his noble mission.

My thanks go also to the members of President Karzai's Government for their cooperation and patience. Many have become close friends, and I wish them well. It is also important to me to salute, from here, the people of Afghanistan. I am proud, and I believe that the Council and the United Nations at large can be proud, too, of the confidence that the overwhelming majority of the people of Afghanistan have in the United Nations. A few days ago, at a particularly tense and difficult moment during the Loya Jirga, a delegate, speaking from the rostrum, said that they, the delegates, had full confidence in UNAMA. That was humbling to all of us, and we are grateful to the people of Afghanistan for the warmth of their feelings towards this Organization and towards the men and women — Afghans and non-Afghans — who are working for the United Nations over there.

It is also my pleasant duty to say a word about colleagues and friends in UNAMA and the rest of the United Nations country team in Afghanistan. Speaking the other day in Kabul, I said that the secret of whatever success I had been fortunate to achieve in Afghanistan was that I had a team of particularly talented and dedicated colleagues — I just watched them work and took the credit for their achievements. To all of them, I will simply say, "Thank you, my very dear friends and colleagues, and may God protect you as you continue the good work you are doing in Afghanistan".

I would like to recognize, too, our colleagues here at Headquarters: the Deputy Secretary-General, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and all other departments, as well as those in other parts of the United Nations — the agencies, funds and programmes — for the unfailing support we received from all of them.

Last but not least, may I say how deeply indebted I feel to the Secretary-General. Throughout these very long months — first in New York when we were preparing the Bonn Conference, then in Bonn and, later, in Kabul — he was always there for us, ever supportive and protective, always encouraging us and reassuring us in moments of doubt. I thank him most sincerely and look forward to continuing to serve this Organization under his inspiring leadership.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Brahimi for his forceful, important and comprehensive briefing, reflecting the outstanding work that he has done in Afghanistan. That is a tribute not only to the Secretariat, but to the Organization as a whole.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should like now to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.